



August 9, 2022

Dear Community Collaborators -

This communication is for the purpose of connecting with community collaborators in regard to the Franciscan Sisters of Mary (FSM). We'd like to introduce ourselves to those who are not familiar with our work, share our intentions behind building a participatory fund, update the community on our progress, and discuss our current grant capacity. As always, we seek to be transparent and are grateful for your patience and support as we continue to learn and navigate our rapidly changing circumstances.

The Mission of FSM

The Mission of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary is to be the presence of the loving, serving, compassionate, healing Jesus. Flowing from our Mission, we focus the power of our intention on compassionate care of creation in collaboration with others.

We direct our resources to support this mission, including our philanthropy, impact investments, and voice and presence. As we stand for justice for our earth and the marginalized, we know that those people most impacted by environmental racism hold the wisdom to craft the best solutions for their communities. Our philanthropy program primarily supports grassroots organizations led by and accountable to those on the frontlines of climate change and environmental degradation, and who are disproportionately communities of color and low-income.

While all issues related to care for creation are deeply interrelated, our current efforts are concentrated in three issue areas where FSM is uniquely positioned to be supportive and make an impact. These include:

- Advancing the environmental justice movement in the Midwest by supporting strong frontline and faith leaders who are organizing their communities to care for Creation.
- Growing a just, sustainable food system in St. Louis by supporting the development of community-owned solutions that benefit people and planet.
- Inspiring Catholic action on climate justice globally and by investing in the most promising solutions and generating returns that propel our mission.

Time of Transition

As the number of our sisters and staff capacity declines, FSM finds itself moving into a new chapter of our story. We see an opportunity to make our giving more collaborative and equitable, and to create a philanthropic culture which is relational, just, and centers on community knowledge and lived experiences. After many months listening to the community, we believe creating a participatory fund will help accomplish this.

On our end, shifting to a participatory model of giving for our local philanthropy will ease FSM's administrative and operational burden, which has become a necessity. This change requires developing a new fund for the St. Louis area, one that can accept a large annual grant from FSM and convene frontline community leaders to make decisions about how to redistribute those dollars. We approach development of the participatory fund with the following intentions:

- Bringing inclusion to this space by centering on voices from the frontlines.
- Focusing on environmental racism.
- Trusting our collaborators to make the best decisions for their communities.
- Continuing to build relationships.
- Shifting power dynamics by giving frontline communities control over financial resources.
- Ensuring that decision-making is collaborative and transparent.

We are excited about the possibilities that can come from this new fund. We are in the beginning stages of this process and have begun conversations with local stakeholders who will help guide the fund's creation.

While building the fund, we remain dedicated to fighting environmental racism and supporting the St. Louis community. Therefore, we will continue funding our current grantees, who include black, brown and multi racial farmers, community organizers, policy advocates, legal defense teams and others. However, due to capacity constraints, FSM cannot take on new grantees.

We understand the dire situation that communities of color are facing due to the devastating impacts of environmental racism. We recognize the privilege we hold and are therefore seeking to change the culture of philanthropy and transfer our power as a funder. We will do this in an intentional way, by building a participatory fund that upholds the values of the local community while handing over decision making power, and thereby allowing the community to invest in itself and address its needs. Upon the fund's rollout, our intent is for frontline leaders to access funds based on criteria set by community members.

We hope and pray this new participatory fund will continue the Mission of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary, advance the regenerative shifts we have been practicing with our philanthropy, and allow us all to move together in right relationship with our humanity and in alignment with one another and the planet.